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TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [CASC](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [AMED](#) [IN](#)  
SUBJECT: AI IN W. BENGAL: SITREP 11

REF: KOLKATA 30 AND PREVIOUS

[11.](#) (U) This is an action message, please see para. 7.

[12.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY: Over the January 26-27 weekend, the avian influenza (AI) virus spread to South 24 Parganas, West Midnapur districts, and newer areas in the already-affected Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts. This brings the number of AI-affected districts to 13 (out of a total 19 districts in the state -note: previous reports improperly listed 18.) H5N1 was detected in samples from backyard poultry in Budge Budge area of [1S.](#) 24 Parganas, which is 11 miles south of Kolkata. As culling operations continue, the GOWB has announced financial assistance to those who have lost their poultry. ConGen met with W. Bengal Home Secretary and AI Project Secretary to express the USG's interest to assist AI control efforts in the state. The Health Secretary asked for information on efficient methods for culling

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large numbers of birds. END SUMMARY.

[13.](#) (U) Over the January 26-27 weekend, the H5N1 virus continued to spread to newer districts of West Bengal. The H5N1 virus was confirmed in poultry samples from the Budge Budge area of South 24 Parganas district, which is located about 11 miles south of Kolkata. Samples from a West Midnapur village, located about 90 miles west of Kolkata also tested positive for H5N1. A few more administrative blocks in AI-affected Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts reported the presence of the virus as well.

[14.](#) (U) The GOWB continued its culling operations. Media reports quoting GOWB officials said that 1.6 million birds have been culled as of January 26. Approximately 600,000 more birds will be culled in the next few days. About 1.2 million people who came in contact with the sick birds are under surveillance, as health teams go house-to-house in the affected villages. Updates are available at GOWB health ministry website:  
[http://www.wbhealth.gov.in/avian\\_influenza\\_Bulletin\\_Board.asp](http://www.wbhealth.gov.in/avian_influenza_Bulletin_Board.asp)

[15.](#) (U) The economic impact of the AI-outbreak is being felt across the state. Backyard poultry-owners in West Bengal have lost and estimated USD 40 million due to the ongoing AI outbreak. The state government has promised a grant of Rs 500 (USD 10.25) to each backyard poultry owner. The state government will provide half the funds, with the GOI picking up the rest. The GOWB plans to facilitate loans for backyard poultry owners to restart their businesses.

¶ 6. (SBU) On January 28, ConGen met with Home Secretary Prasad Ranjan Ray, who is responsible for state security and who is directing the effort to prevent AI from spreading into Kolkata, to discuss the AI situation. ConGen again offered USG assistance as needed by the state to manage the AI outbreak. Ray was appreciative and said that he would convey the offer to Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Ray said that AI had not entered Kolkata and that measures to monitor and restrict poultry entering the city were sufficient.

¶ 7. (SBU) ConGen also met with the WB Ministry of Health's Dr. Rajendra Shukla to discuss his ministry's AI response. Shukla admitted that it had taken time to get rapid response teams in place but that now with 1,014 teams in operation culling was happening rapidly. He noted that 17 people had been tested for possible AI but all results were negative. He also believed that the health ministry had sufficient measures and resources in place to respond to possible human AI cases. Shukla expressed interest in more efficient culling approaches as he commented that the manual killing of chickens by breaking their necks was tiring and time consuming. ConGen responded that he would inquire as to more efficient methods of culling. Post would appreciate information on culling methods that could assist the GOWB.

¶ 8. (SBU) Comment: GOWB officials continue to state that the AI outbreak is under control. However, successive reports of new affected districts, indicates that the infection continues to spread and that more districts are likely to be report infections in the near future.

JARDINE